

TV OKLA GUIDE

Is TV Doing Justice To Our Legal System?

By Attorney General
Griffin Bell

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35c Local Programs
Oct. 21-27



The Cast of
'WKRP in Cincinnati'



TV Teletype: New York

JANE HALL REPORTS:

LAURENCE LUCKINBILL has been cast as former President RICHARD M. NIXON in Blind Ambition, the four-part CBS miniseries based on the book by JOHN DEAN, Mr. Nixon's former White House counsel. MARTIN SHEEN will play Dean in the miniseries, now being filmed in Washington, D.C., for broadcast in May . . . HENRY WINKLER introduces the ABC presentation of "Who Are the DeBolts, and Where Did They Get 19 Kids?" a documentary about a couple who adopt handicapped children. The film, which will be seen Dec. 17, won an Academy Award this year . . . GERALDINE FITZGERALD plays a free-spirited woman who lives with her horse in the Rocky Mountains in "Big Red," an NBC Special Treat for children. Also in the cast are MARTA KOBER, GIL ROGERS and MARLENA LUSTIK.

*Trade-mark, Teletype Corp

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Get the Johnny Carson show before it's bleeped!

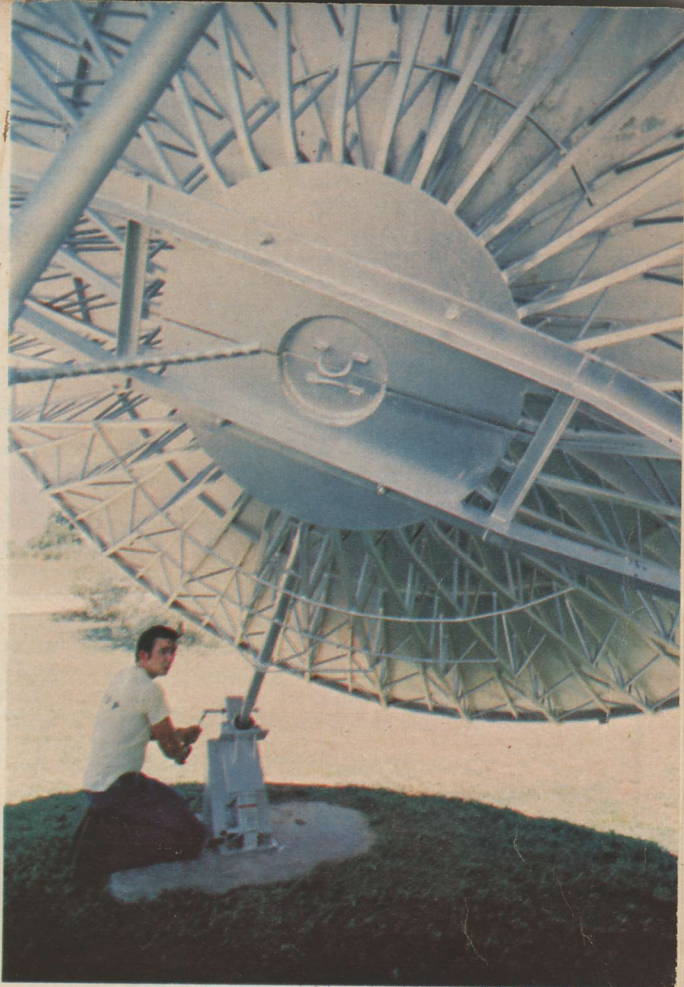
With a satellite terminal, you can pull in everything from Mexican bullfights to a Redd Foxx nightclub act

By R.B. Cooper Jr.

If you live in a major metropolis—New York City, say—you may be able to pick up as many as nine television stations. If you're in a rural or remote area, perhaps you get only one or two stations—or none at all.

I live on a farm, 20 miles outside of Oklahoma City. And in my house we have a choice of 36 different TV channels. We watch live soccer from Argentina, bullfights from Mexico, pro-

R.B. Cooper Jr., is editor in chief of CATJ, a cable-television trade magazine published in Oklahoma City.



Cooper and his 20-foot back-yard antenna.

grams in French from Montreal. We get Notre Dame basketball and live sports from Madison Square Garden. We receive programming that's normally available only to those who have cable or pay-TV services (Home Box Office, Showtime, Fanfare and others) that offer special sporting events, seven to 12 hours per day of first-run movies (without commercials) and the nightclub acts of such performers as Redd Foxx, Helen Reddy, Tom Jones and dozens of others. Then there is Atlanta's WTCG, the 24-hour sports-and-movie station →

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now carried on cable systems in 41 states, via satellite; plus other independents from Los Angeles (KTTV), Chicago (WGN-TV), San Francisco (KTVU) and New York (WOR-TV).

We can choose from this remarkable cornucopia of programming because of a space-age wonder that sits in our country back yard. It is a *private satellite terminal*—a shallow steel dish (or antenna), 20 feet in diameter, with its base embedded in concrete. The dish is aimed at a communications satellite some 22,300 miles above the equator. The satellite is in synchronous orbit with the Earth; it appears to hang in space in exactly the same spot over the United States as the Earth revolves. Once properly aimed, the antenna never has to be moved. (By rotating the antenna, though, we can pick up TV signals from four other satellites as well.) The antenna is hooked up to two other essential parts: a special receiver tuned to satellite-signal frequencies, and a low-noise amplifier to strengthen the signals.

The range of choices afforded by satellite TV is almost enough to dull the senses. Take a Sunday afternoon in the fall during pro-football season. In your town you may have, between CBS and NBC, a selection of two to four pro games. In my house, the "bird" lets us choose from as many as 11 games telecast live. During the baseball season, hardly a night goes by that between three and six televised games are not on one of the five satellites within reach of my back-yard antenna. I once sat down with the program schedules for the 36 satellite channels to tally the hours per week of sporting events and the number of movies in a single week's time. The score: 180 hours of sporting events and 247 movies. (My neighbors, with local TV, had 16 hours of sports and 23 movies.)

Good grief—how do you get in on this? It takes some doing, but it's possible. You should understand, of course,

that satellite transmissions are not intended for home reception. Satellites are put into space by companies such as Western Union (Westar I and II) and RCA American Communications (Satcom I and II) as "common carriers for hire." That means they contract on a case-by-case basis to relay television programs from one point to another, for money.

An FCC policy based upon a 1934 law says that you cannot simply erect an antenna and tune in satellite reception—unless you apply to the FCC for a developmental license to do so. I was one of the first to get such a license; my intelligence network tells me that most of the estimated 3000 back-yard terminal operators have not bothered to do so. There is no license fee and no test to take, but a licensee is expected to obtain written authorization for access to programs from the various program suppliers, who may charge a fee.

Most of the back-yard terminals now operating got there by one of two routes. The first is the cable-television industry. At the present time 10 of the 36 or so satellite TV channels operating are dedicated to cable-television program relay. (Some 700 community-antenna television, or CATV, systems have terminals; another 800 are expected to have them within a year.) Thus, many of the back-yard private terminals have been purchased from the companies that sell professional terminals to cable systems. How much? When the first CATV system installed an Earth terminal in September of 1975, it paid more than \$100,000 for the installation. Today comparable terminals sell professionally for under \$20,000, installed.

Using a smaller antenna, you can get the same five-satellite, 36-channel reception in your back yard for around \$10,000, installed. Or there's the second route: if you are willing to do your own concrete work and put in 20 hours or so of erector-set construction, it →

continued

will cost you less than \$6000—roughly the price of a car or an in-ground swimming pool. And if you're clever with tools and electronics, you might do the job for about \$3000.

Henry Howard of San Andreas, Cal., built his own terminal out of surplus radar parts for about \$1500. Henry has an advantage most people don't have: he is a professor of electrical engineering at Stanford. In Sheffield, England, a BBC engineer named Steve Birkill has his own eight-foot terminal. Birkill is one of those "build-it-all-myself" guys and his satellite reception includes about a dozen channels from Moscow (via a Russian satellite), Spain, Argentina, Brazil and numerous African and Middle Eastern countries. Birkill has invested less than \$1000—but probably 1000 hours of his own time.

If you are not a Henry Howard or a Steve Birkill, where do you go? Your best bet is to visit the office of a nearby cable TV system and ask to look at copies of some of the CATV trade journals; they are filled with ads and articles on Earth terminal stations. Or you might ask them to recommend a suitable Earth terminal supplier. You can't walk into a neighborhood store to buy the parts—yet. But the size and cost of equipment are already beginning to drop. My 20-foot-diameter antenna is something of a dinosaur compared to a smaller, lighter six-foot model I installed recently. And, as you might have guessed, the Japanese have a new experimental satellite in operation, with prototype home terminals—selling for about \$500!—now being tested in rural Japan and Okinawa.

If you find yourself fascinated by the prospect of satellite TV, there are a few things you should know. First, there is a distinct danger of addiction: the reception quality of satellite signals is exceptionally good. Second, if you don't already own a home video-tape recorder you'll immediately want one

when you get satellite service. Having movies such as "Rocky" or "Airport '77" in your home—uncut and uninterrupted by commercials—is a little like having a friend in Hollywood. (You should be aware, though, that two major production companies are involved in a lawsuit against Sony Corp. and several retailers of its video-cassette recorders. The production companies seek to prevent what they regard as unauthorized copying of their programs.) Third, be prepared for some . . . well, *unusual* television. The Johnny Carson show, for instance, is done "live" in Burbank at about 5 P.M. Pacific Standard Time. The show goes live via satellite to New York, where it is edited and taped for network play some hours later. The live version on satellite is typically sent without "bleeps" and often without commercials; during those numerous commercial breaks the cameras and mikes continue to run "hot" on the satellite. Around our house we call this version "R-rated Carson."

A final word of advice. You may want to do what a West Texas rancher did. He placed his 10-foot satellite antenna under a geodesic dome. To protect it from the elements? Heck no; an antenna could take a Yukon winter in stride. He wanted to *hide* it. He had been introduced to satellite TV by a friend in the Dallas area, and the friend hadn't had an evening's peace since he installed his terminal. It seems that when word gets around that you have a back-yard station, everyone you ever met is a bosom buddy. When a blacked-out fight or the Indy 500 is on the "bird," people tend to drop by in hordes.

The Cooper family solved that problem at our house: we moved far into the country. And now, when some cowboy wanders down our dirt road looking for directions back to civilization, we never mention satellite television. "Oh, that?" we respond. "Just some Government space-tracking station." **END**